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ABSTRACT

The Analysis of Public Issues Approach to ethics education assumes that controversy is inevitable within a society committed to human worth and made up of diverse groups. This cognitive approach is based on the Oliver and Shaver book, "Teaching Public Issues in the High School." Controversy ensures that societal problems are brought to light; without it, citizen participation in the decision making process would be meaningless. This approach further assumes that the school should aid students in learning to participate in decision making. The cognitive frame calls for learning concepts and skills which aid in verifying facts and generalizations. The emotive impact of language, the psychological processes involved in decision making, and the basic values of a democratic society are also examined. Possible parental objections to this approach are noted. This method is contrasted with the Values Clarification and Kohlberg's Moral Development models. Implications for ethics education include joint responsibilities of school, home, and community. (KC)

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A COGNITIVE DECISION-MAKING APPROACH TO ETHICS EDUCATION: FOCUS ON PUBLIC ISSUES*

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Labor Day, 1976. Cloudy and rain threatening. Scratch the cook-out in the mountains. Out with the paint brush, and a few dabs on the eaves. A sprinkle of rain. Good excuse to quit. Noon. A quick survey of things to be done. Shrubs to trim. Firewood to cut. Basement to be cleaned up. Car to wash. But. . . work at the office to be done.

A stop at Pete's Spudnut on the way to the University. Seaburger and coffee ordered from Pete himself. Pete sits down. Chit chat about the weather and the weekend, then. . . "What's your choice between Ford and Carter?" Hesitation, and answer, "Carter".

Fragments from a conversation. "He proposes 'full employment'. More welfare. Those willing to work supporting those who won't." "Those who have should help those who because of circumstances have not. But welfare programs need overhauling to encourage work and self-sufficiency." "Many won't work. Or will only take skilled, white collar jobs. Would rather draw unemployment." "Everyone who wants to work should have a job, at their level of training, if possible. Government should create work programs." "No. Too much bureaucracy and waste. Give money to businesses to create work." "Waste in business, too. And, too much to 'profit'. 'Welfare' for the well-to-do. Lockheed. Government funds. Millions in bribes. Welfare ripoff at its worst." "Can't judge all businessmen by a few." "Can't judge all unemployed by a few." "Teacher contract. 10%. Outrageous. Inflationary."

SO 010 405

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"Cost of living. How cut into the spiral. Responsibility, business or labor?" "Individual responsibility to work. Not expect government handout. Not the willing-to-work supporting the unwilling." "Circumstances. Each should have a chance regardless of accidents or birth. Not handouts. Opportunity to be self-sufficient." "Not so far apart. Don't understand how you can vote for Carter." "Different emphasis on equality and compassion versus freedom and self-reliance."

An hour! Pay the bill. On the way to the office. Education for citizenship? Pete and me as citizens? Half hour slot on the program? The office. The typewriter. A summary of position.

There is no one "Cognitive Decision-making Approach to Ethics Education". A number of educators start from a similar premise: That in a society that respects the worth and dignity of the individual, and so protects the opportunity for each citizen to participate in the political decision-making process, a central focus of citizenship education must be the enhancement of rational decision-making capacities. This assumption is stated in various ways, and the definition of "rational" decision-making varies, for example, from Hunt and Metcalf (1968), to Coombs and Meux (1971), to Oliver and Shaver (1966). I can speak only for one "cognitive" approach, the one based on the Oliver and Shaver (1966) book, Teaching Public Issues in the High School, that has come to be known as The Analysis of Public Issues Approach (Shaver & Larkins, 1973 a, b).

The Analysis of Public Issues Approach assumes that controversy is inevitable in a society committed to human worth and dignity and made up of diverse groups, and that it is good--because it ensures that societal problems and potential solutions are brought into the open.

Without public controversy, citizen participation in political decision-making is meaningless. It is also assumed that, as the formal educational institution for the society, the school should help students learn to engage rationally in the decision-making that creates and is necessitated by controversy.

Our emphasis is on public issues--issues debated and decided in the political context. And, these issues are ethical issues, in the sense that they involve questions of proper aims and actions for the society and persons in the society. Recall the conversation at Pete's Spudnut: What presidential candidate should one vote for? Should the government seek full employment? Should welfare programs be maintained? Who should bear the weight of cutting the inflationary spiral, business or labor? All of these are political-ethical issues, ranging from personal action to public policy.

To answer such questions, facts and verified generalizations are critical. The content of history and the social sciences could provide some of these--such as an economic understanding of the relationship between wages, profits, and prices. But skills and concepts for arriving at one's own facts and generalizations are important, too. How many people do refuse to work even when jobs are available? For how many people does welfare undercut self-sufficiency? What alternatives are available that might improve the chances that welfare programs will better meet the goal of assisting those who are economically destitute without rewarding people for avoiding employment? These are a few questions of a factual nature that can be drawn from the fragments of the Spudnut conversation. Interestingly, Pete and I chose to challenge

few of each others' factual assertions. But often the most heated arguments are over the facts of a situation or over the workability of a proposed solution.

The Analysis of Public Issues Approach assumes that the cognitive skills needed for decision-making by citizens go beyond the raising and answering of questions about facts and factual generalizations. This assumption distinguishes our approach from much of the rest of social studies curriculum development activity. Many developers, claiming to be concerned with helping students be more rational citizens, have focused on history and the social sciences; specifically, on how to help students think like scientists. And inevitably, the emphasis has been on the empirical--on formulating and verifying factual questions and generalizations.

An adequate frame for making political-ethical decisions (decisions about proper aims and actions made in the political context) needs to take into account the obvious fact that language is central to thought and communication: That being careful about word meanings is critical in dealing with public issues. (For example, were Pete and I careful enough in our use of the word "welfare"? That is, did our loose use of the word interfere with our attempt to deal with issues?) That words have emotive meanings that can sway the way we think. (Note how the negatively loaded term welfare was used in the Spudnut conversation to attack the suggestion that business should be used as the channel for government work program funds.) That stereotyping is common, but often counterproductive, in thinking through policies. (All "businessmen" are not alike, nor are all "unemployed".)

The Analysis of Public Issues Approach also involves helping persons become aware of the extent to which underlying personal, "psychological" needs influence their decision-making. No, not the probing of the personal depths of students' minds to ferret out hidden meanings in their statements, nor the attribution of covert significance to the actions of others--although it may be that we do not pay enough attention in politics to the subtle needs that motivate people. But at least a recognition of the way fundamental psychological processes impact our decision-making. Such as that what we expect to see in others will influence what we do see. And that each of us has a need for orderliness of thought which makes it difficult for us to admit and deal with our own inconsistencies. For example, a person might like to reject welfare programs outright. But he/she finds that position difficult to maintain once it is admitted that all people do not have the same opportunities to be gainfully employed and that a commitment to brotherhood suggests that those who have should be willing to help those who have not.

And, that leads to another, fundamental aspect of the Analysis of Public Issues Approach. That is, the assumption that values--our standards or principles for judging worth--are essential to deciding on and justifying positions on public issues, and that the soundest, most persuasive justification comes from using the basic values of a democratic society: Human worth and dignity at the apex, and the other values that define and protect human dignity (such as freedom of speech and the press, already mentioned above, freedom of religion, due process of law, equal protection of the law, domestic tranquility--

mentioned primarily but not exclusively in the Declaration of Independence and our Constitution).

No one is likely to claim that all arguments over public issues or justifications of stands on public issues rely only, or even primarily, on reference to the basic values of our society. Nor could one even claim that all, or even most, of the people in the society can articulate the values clearly. That is, in fact, one of the major condemnations of American schooling: The lack of attention to involving people in defining what values are basic to the society, in clarifying the meaning of those values, and in applying the values to political-ethical decisions. For example, people are rarely cognizant of the extent to which their stands on public issues reflect racial and/or sexual prejudices, fly in the face of basic American values, such as equality of opportunity, and yet may be supported by other basic values, such as freedom of choice and freedom of association.

Note, however, that not only is there disagreement over which values are to be called "basic" (for example, should patriotism be included?); but the values themselves are vague in meaning (whether one includes patriotism as a basic value may depend on how it is defined), and their meanings are, in our pluralistic society, a source of controversy (Does freedom of speech mean the right to say whatever one wants, even to the use of four-letter words; or does it mean only saying things that don't offend others?). Moreover, the basic values conflict inherently with one another. Equality confronted self-reliance in the Spudnut conversation. Freedom of speech often comes at the cost of someone else's privacy, or at the risk of violence, or as a threat

to national security. Enhancing the equality of ethnic minorities and of women has meant limiting the freedoms of others. Majority rule conflicts with personal rights, such as freedom of religion. Due process of law runs afoul of security.*

These inevitable conflicts between values don't exist only "out there" in arguments between people; they exist within each of us. But we are often not aware of them. In fact, we are adept at keeping them from our consciousness. The Analysis of Public Issues Approach assumes that being aware of the basic values and the conflicts among them is essential to citizenship education, both as a basis for rational decision-making and to combat cynicism. From this view, the mission of a democratic society is not the perfect achievement of such values as equality of opportunity or freedom of association as ideals, but the constant facing of consternation over issues that raise the question, What mix of the basic values should our public policies support in order to maximize human dignity? The answer will, of course, change as circumstances change (the Great Depression of the 1930s led to a shift in emphasis from economic freedom to economic security) and as policy affects circumstances (civil rights legislation has redressed many inequalities, to the point that some people now claim that programs such as Affirmative Action have swung the pendulum too far).

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*Note that the role of the courts, especially the Supreme Court, specifically and intentionally assigned to them by the Founding Fathers, of protecting individual and minority rights and settling legal disagreements over the meaning of basic values begets them much vituperative criticism from people who don't understand the need to balance basic values.

Summary

The Analysis of Public Issues Approach, then, as one Cognitive Decision-making Approach to Citizenship Education, centers on citizenship participation in the difficult decisions that confront the society as it seeks to maximize human dignity. It rests on a rationale* that recognizes controversy as inevitable, because of the pluralistic or multicultural nature of our society coupled with the vagueness and inherent conflicts between our basic values. The cognitive frame for decision-making calls not only for recognizing and dealing with value vagueness and conflict, but for awareness of the ways in which our psychological mechanisms affect our decision-making. The frame also stresses the need to deal explicitly with language, including its emotive impacts, and with concepts and skills for verifying relevant facts and generalizations.

Not Only Cognitive

No adequate approach to citizenship education can be exclusively cognitive; and, as should be obvious from the discussion above, the Analysis of Public Issues Approach is not. Citizenship, including the decision-making component of citizenship, is not purely intellectual, non-emotional. Humans, not unfeeling robots, are the decision-makers, and the nonrational is critical, for personal fulfillment and for societal longevity. Gunnar Myrdal (1944), among others, has suggested that commitment to the basic values of our society (Myrdal calls them an "American Creed") is the "cement" that holds this large and diverse society together.

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*Oliver, 1957; Oliver and Shaver, 1966; Shaver and Strong, 1976.

Despite all the differences in political, economic, and social orientations, wherever one goes in this country he/she will find that people feel positively about the basic values--such as freedom of speech, equality of opportunity, freedom of religion--although they may often be upset about the way the values are being interpreted by "those in power" and/or unaware that their own stands on issues run counter to the values. This common feeling, usually unarticulated, provides not only a cohesive force for society, but the context for debate and disagreement--for fruitful argument depends upon shared commitment to values. Without that, argument is meaningless and not worthwhile because it lacks confrontation and engagement. The Analysis of Public Issues Approach is based on the assumption that an emphasis on cognitive decision-making must not be allowed to lead one to overlook the powerful utility to the society of emotive commitments.

Note, too, that the thrust of the Analysis of Public Issues Approach is not toward winning arguments, but toward arriving at justified political-ethical decisions. This calls for the sincere consideration of alternative policies and/or actions, which entails being able to "see everyday events from the perspectives of others--no holds barred" (Berlak, 1976). Such empathy or sensitivity relies on a mixture of the emotive and the cognitive, and illustrates how inextricably intertwined the two are.

That emotion is an essential element in the conception of citizenship education that includes analyzing public issues as a central theme is demonstrated by another desirable cognitive-emotive outcome--action. That is, citizenship demands not only the ability to think through political-ethical issues, but the predisposition and the know-how to act within the political decision-making process. Thought and action

should be linked (Newmann, 1975); and that is difficult to do in the traditional classroom setting.

No realistic approach to citizenship education can be purely "cognitive". Citizenship participation involves components of feeling and intelligence which impact thought and action in an infinite variety of ways from individual to individual.

Private versus Public

It should be clear that the Analysis of Public Issues Approach is concerned with "ethics education" in the sense of helping students to make better (i.e., more carefully thought through and justified) decisions about political-ethical issues as a basis for political participation. There is no pretense of teaching students the "right" ethics. It is assumed that reasonable people can and will disagree over proper policy and/or action. But it is also assumed that the teacher has the right and the obligation to expect students to warrant their decisions through careful attention to facts, language usage, and values.

Experience indicates that parents may object to this approach on several grounds. One is that students who learn to verify facts, to be perceptive about language, and to analyze value conflicts and value-decision relationships are often seen as impertinent and bothersome when they apply their improved skills at home. Another ground is the more fundamental. That is, parents will sometimes see the attempt to increase their children's rationality as subversive. The discussion of issues in our approach takes place in a context of commitment to the basic values of the society, so is not subversive in that sense,

but it may indeed lead to the questioning of local or personal interests and biases and thus be viewed by parents as corrupting. This parental reaction, I would argue, is an indication of the failure of past public schooling efforts in citizenship education.

But parental objection may come on still another ground. Although it is simple to say that the approach focuses on public issues, at least implicitly to the exclusion of the probing of private or personal ethical issues, that distinction is not always an easy one to make or honor. Oftentimes if the consideration of a public issue is to be meaningful for students, it must be brought to the level of their concrete experience. This can often best be done by posing more abstract value dilemmas in analogous situations within the students' experiences. A student who finds it difficult to comprehend the conflict between privacy and security in a case involving a search-and-seizure case may find the dilemma more meaningful if it is posed in terms of the principal searching his/her locker for suspected drugs. (This moving of the value dilemma from the abstract-societal to the more concrete-personal may also serve to invoke the personal concern that leads to a problem that is "real" to the student.) Many parents object when students are asked to make and defend "personal" ethical choices. Asking students, tactfully, to consider concrete situations often out of their personal experiences, may often be essential to involving them in decisions about political-ethical issues.

Moreover, there is another sense in which matters of public and personal, or private, morality are not easily distinguished. Clearly, many public issues are based on individual, private decisions. Welfare,

abortion, divorce, child abuse, use of natural resources, business practices, race relations, to name a few, are issue areas that are contingent upon personal decisions by individuals. To ignore these would be to eviscerate citizenship education.

But where to draw the line in pursuing matters of a personal ethical nature involves very difficult questions to which there are no pat, universal answers. Parents should be involved in making such decisions, in a climate of mutual concern and interchange, not as "outsiders" attacking the school to protect cherished rights threatened by a remote bureaucracy.

And, Other Approaches

It seems appropriate to conclude this brief overview of the Analysis of Public Issues Approach as one Cognitive Decision-making Approach (which obviously involves feeling and emotion, as well) by contrasting it quickly with the other two educational-psychological approaches to ethics education being presented at this Conference--the Values Clarification Approach and Kohlberg's Moral Development Approach. This is not intended to be a critique of the other two approaches, only a brief contrasting from the Public Issues point of view.

The major concern with the Values Clarification Approach as a path to citizenship education, from the Analysis of Public Issues point of view, is a lack of a rationale tied to a conception of citizenship in a democratic society (Shaver & Strong, 1976; Stewart, 1975). This leads, from our point of view, to several unfortunate outcomes. First, there is a lack of criteria relevant to the public concerns of the society to ensure that problems selected for clarification do not

infringe on the private, personal concerns of students. In fact, one criterion is that the problems be of a personal nature, so as to be motivating to the student. The emphasis, indeed, appears to be on the personal mental health of the student rather than on any model of citizen decision-making or action.

Some parents find this probing of the personal objectionable. From our point of view, it is often an unwarranted invasion of privacy, particularly when peer pressure in the group setting leads, or forces, students to reveal more about themselves or others than they, or the others, might wish.

Furthermore, without the frame of a rationale based on conceptions of citizenship, of appropriate reasoning skills, and of the basic set of values which are central to our democracy, the approach tends to be relativistic. As long as the student has explored his commitments and is willing to act on them, it appears that the value clarification process is judged successful. There appears to be little concern with either the intellectual rigor used or learned by the student, nor with the legitimacy of the standards or principles (the values) used by students in reaching greater clarity about their commitments.

As mentioned above, drawing the line between the legitimate and the unwarranted exploration of students' personal experiences, feelings, and beliefs is always difficult. But with an approach that is oriented toward the personal, rather than toward the public, the inherent danger is that the distinction will not even be recognized. Greater clarity about one's own commitments may well help to alleviate some societal problems that are based on matters of personal ethics (e.g., family stability, pollution, crimes). But there is little to indicate

that the Value Clarification Approach impacts citizenship participation, and there is much that appears objectionable about its use in the public school.

Note that value clarification is a part of the Analysis of Public Issues Approach. But as part of an intellectual frame for dealing with public issues in the context of the basic values of the society and recognizing the inherent conflicts in trying, as individuals, to apply those commitments to political-ethical issues.

By contrast with the Value Clarification Approach, Kohlberg's Moral Development Approach is grounded in a careful psychological and philosophical framework. The nonpsychologist, noneducator should be aware, however, that despite the years of intensive, even brilliant work by Kohlberg, there are still serious questions about both the research (Fraenkel, 1976; Simpson, 1974; Kurtines & Greif, 1974) and the philosophical (Scriven, 1975; Peters, 1975) underpinnings for his work. Perhaps more serious is the rather rapid and seemingly premature transfer of Kohlberg's theoretical work in moral development to classroom practice under the banner, "Moral Education". The difficulties of identifying the moral stages of students in the classroom setting and of conducting the appropriate discussions of moral dilemmas for classrooms of students at various moral stages have not yet been adequately resolved (Fraenkel, 1976; Rest, 1974).

The emphasis, educationally, is that the moral stage at which a student reasons can be advanced by confronting him/her with arguments, during the discussion of moral dilemmas, at a stage above his/her present level. The question of the intellectual skills--i.e., to handle language, factual, and value disputes--relevant to ethical decision-making at any level or moral reasoning is not treated.

So the Approach is too narrow to be labeled, "moral education" (as Kohlberg and some of his followers have begun to do) and, in fact, to so label it, may be dysfunctional in that it may lead teachers to believe that by conducting "Kohlbergian" value dilemma discussions, they have accomplished "moral education" rather than the more limited, if important, task of contributing to development of moral cognitive reasoning. And the question still is open as to whether "Just Community Schools"--schools organized on the basis of Kohlberg's moral development theory--will be feasible educational alternatives.

There is much that is compatible between the Analysis of Public Issues Approach and the Moral Development Approach. Neither is relativistic: Kohlberg's concern with justice in the form of equality (Kohlberg, 1976) is not foreign to our concern for human worth and dignity as defined and protected by the society's basic values, (nor to Scriven's, 1966, notion of equal consideration). As Kohlberg (1976, p. 214) has noted, "Our civic culture rests upon a Declaration of Independence and a Constitution written from a Stage 5 perspective, a moral and political philosophy of the social contract and of universal human rights". Clearly, that is the orientation of the rationale for the Analysis of Public Issues Approach. And, the two approaches are linked by our insistence that the critical public policy issues are "should" questions--issues of ethics, or in Kohlberg's terms, of moral judgment. Lockwood (1976) has done an excellent job of relating the two approaches and suggesting that reasoning on public policy issues can be categorized according to Kohlberg's moral development schema, and that moral level is an "important component" of reasoning on public issues.

Education and Schooling

Obviously, there are no easy answers to what should constitute ethics education for citizenship. The advocates of the Analysis of Public Issues Approach do insist that if the schools are to have an impact in this area, curriculum and school people must operate from clearer conceptions of the nature of the democratic society and its values. Clearly, too, citizenship education must involve more than a focus on decision-making from a cognitive perspective--empathy and sensitivity to the views of others, and the predisposition and knowledge for action to impact policy are among the other important components of adequate citizenship.

To impact significantly the various aspects of citizenship requires more than classroom instruction. There must be tutored involvement in community action and--as Kohlberg's notion of the just community school so aptly suggests--the total environment of the school must also be addressed. Surely, too, we must recognize that the school is only one, and not necessarily the most significant, educational factor in the students' lives. As the formal educational institution for the society, the school, through its systematic attention to learning, should be able to impact citizenship participation both quantitatively and qualitatively; but the influence of the home, the employment environment in which each of us spends so much time after school, the church with its present challenge to be meaningful, other voluntary groups, the overpresent mass media surely must be brought to bear more systematically on ethics education for citizenship. That, as I understand it, is the hope and the promise of a Conference such as this one.

Educators should have a special role in citizenship education. They should have thought carefully about ethics education as part of their roles, because they do have special obligations as schooling agents for the society. But educators have by no means a monopoly on education, as both they and lay people are, on occasion, too prone to forget. Joint responsibility for the young, with appropriate professional instruction, but with consultation from the home and, even more important, an atmosphere of concern that reflects the commitments of a democratic society in the home, on the job, in church and other voluntary organizations, through the media are essential if the society is to grow more rational in its continuing search for maximal human dignity.

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